Interview with Dorothy Dillon

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series

DR. DOROTHY DILLON

Interviewed by: Allen Hansen

Initial interview date: May 10, 1988

Biosketch

Q: Being interviewed in Washington, DC, is Dr. Dorothy Dillon, retired Foreign Service Officer, USIA. Dr. Dillon, who received her doctorate in US and Latin American history at Columbia University in 1947, taught at Sweetbriar College and Rutgers University. She came to Washington in 1948 and worked at various government agencies before joining the Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) of the Department of State in 1951. In 1953 she transferred to the newly-established US Information Agency. In 1960, she joined the Foreign Service of USIA, working initially with the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. In 1963, her first assignment abroad was as cultural attach# and deputy PAO in Guatemala, followed by an assignment as cultural affairs officer in Manila. She later became USIA policy officer for Latin America, then deputy assistant director, and in 1973 assistant director for Latin America.

She retired from USIA in 1978, but has been active in Latin American affairs since then, including service as Director of the Washington Center for Latin American Studies from

1978 to 1982. Since 1984, she has been a member of the Foreign Service Grievance Board. She is also a contributing editor of the Times of the Americas.

Dorothy, please begin by telling us how you happened to join the Foreign Service of USIA.

DILLON: Well, it goes back a long way. I was supposed to go into the Foreign Service of the Department of State in 1948 when I left Rutgers University. But the Department had budgetary problems that year, and therefore had to withdraw its offer to me to join the Foreign Service as a reserve officer. So I went to the Library of Congress for a year as director of a bibliographical project on Latin America for the UN, and then went over to the Office of Reports and Estimates of the Central Intelligence Agency for about a year and a half as an intelligence analyst on Latin America.

Meanwhile, I had met at various meetings the then-Chief of the Latin American Division in the Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) of the Department of State who said that he would like me to come over as an analyst in his division as soon as he had a slot available. This happened in 1951. In that year I went to the Department of State as an intelligence analyst.

I also became involved in what was at that time called the Coordinator for Psychological Intelligence. So in effect, I had two jobs. I was the Coordinator for Psychological Intelligence for Latin America and an analyst for the area in the Latin American Division of OIR.

In 1953, when the United States Information Agency was set up in the Eisenhower Administration, most of us who were in the Coordinator for Psychological Intelligence office moved over to the United States Information Agency and became the nucleus of USIA's Office of Research and Intelligence (IRI).

Q: You were in the Civil Service at this time.

DILLON: I was in the Civil Service, right. Now, at that time, we had the option of either staying in the Department of State or going to USIA. It was also the time of the so-called Wristonization program in the Department of State. People in the Civil Service were being encouraged to go into the Foreign Service, and those of us who were considering going to USIA were being urged by the personnel people in the State Department to go into the Foreign Service at State.

In my case, for family reasons at that time, I was not ready to go into the Foreign Service, and it seemed to me very clear that career options would be extremely limited in the Department of State if one did not go into the Foreign Service. So consequently, I decided to go with USIA, the new agency. In effect, I became the Latin American branch of the Office of Research and Intelligence in USIA, while other people were being recruited.

Eventually, a Foreign Service officer was brought in as chief of the branch and I became his deputy. Then, in 1956, he moved to another assignment and I became chief of the Latin American branch in IR.

Q: That is now the Office of Research in USIA, isn't it?

DILLON: Yes, the name changed over the years, but it was originally called the Office of Research and Intelligence. It was the research arm of USIA and included activities such as media reaction studies, public opinion polling, keeping track of Communist propaganda activities around the world, etc., etc.

I believe I was the first woman to become a branch chief in USIA. After two years in that job, I was offered the opportunity to become deputy director of IRI and that is where I ran into the first real problem with respect to discrimination against women.

Encountering Discrimination AgainstWomen in Higher Positions

Q: This was deputy director of the whole office, not just the Latin American branch?

DILLON: That's right. (The Latin American branch was in one of the divisions within IRI.) Although the director of IRI wanted me as his deputy, my appointment was vetoed at higher levels in the agency. As far as I am aware, the director of the agency was not involved and did not know anything about it. Also, the then-director of personnel was not aware of the situation. In any case, a compromise was struck; someone else was put into the deputy director job, and I was made deputy chief of one of the divisions in IRI, with the understanding that when that division chief would leave, I would then become the division chief. The thought was that perhaps feelings against having a woman as a division chief might be less strong than those against having a woman as deputy director of an office, a higher level position.

In any case, what happened was that a new director of IRI came in who was clearly not interested in having any women in senior positions, and so I knew that my path was blocked there. I was casting around to see what my options might be. I was offered a job in publishing in New York, and I considered that. I also considered going back to academic life.

Then one day, just by chance at lunch, I happened to run into L.K. Little, who was then the Director of Personnel in USIA. We had lunch together, and I told him what my situation was. He said he didn't know anything about what had happened to me, but suggested that I might consider joining the Foreign Service simply to get out of this particular situation. He also said it would give me greater flexibility in terms of assignment.

Q: Was the Foreign Service considered more liberal?

DILLON: It wasn't. No, as a matter of fact, although I was supposed to go into the Foreign Service in the beginning of my career in government, I had since that time leaned that there was great discrimination against women in the Foreign Service. However, I did have to get myself out of IRI because my career was completely blocked. It was also a very uncomfortable situation.

1960: Entrance Into Foreign Service

So I decided, in any case, to try for the Foreign Service, and I was paneled eventually and accepted. This was in 1960. There wasn't any assignment in the field in Latin America at that time that was really suitable, so on my own, I went over to see some of the people in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the Department of State, and they offered me an assignment over there on their planning staff. I stayed there for roughly two years until finally an assignment opened up in Latin America, and the then-assistant director for Latin America offered me the assignment of cultural affairs officer in Guatemala. I went there in January of 1963.

First Overseas Assignment: Guatemala, 1963

Q: Before we discuss Guatemala, I wonder if you'd tell us anything about the feelings at State, since you were in Washington at the time, with regard to the establishment of this new propaganda agency, USIA.

DILLON: The way we understood it, the then-Secretary of State had no great interest in keeping within the Department of State the cultural and informational activities of the Department. He was happy to see them taken out of the Department of State and put into a new agency.

Senator Fulbright Opposed Putting Culturaland Educational Programs in USIA

The only program that was left in the Department of State was the official educational and cultural exchange program, and the reason that it was left in the Department was because Senator Fulbright, who was very actively involved in all of this, did not wish the educational and cultural program to go into what he called “that propaganda agency,” meaning USIA. Of course, what the senator did not realize was that overseas the people with whom embassy officials were dealing didn't know the difference between USIA or the Department of State or the man in the moon. And since the cultural affairs officers

of USIA administered the educational and cultural program overseas, in effect, they had two masters in Washington. They were responsible to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, CU for short, in the Department of State, for the exchange program and for the rest of the cultural program—they were responsible to USIA in Washington. This lasted for a quarter of a century, until finally, in the Carter Administration, the CU part of the Department of State was finally moved over into USIA. After 25 years of separation, all of the cultural and informational programs of the United States Government finally rested in one agency.

You recall for a few years the agency changed its name to the International Communication Agency, but that didn't last too long and it came back to USIA once again.

Q: Would you tell us a little bit about your first assignment, what Guatemala was like in those days, and what was the interest of the US in Guatemala at that time?

DILLON: Guatemala was a fascinating place. Ironically, it had been the country that I was supposed to go to in 1948 when I had been offered the Foreign Service reserve appointment by the Department of State, which didn't materialize because of budget problems.

In the meantime, I had visited the country on official business, and I was delighted to go back. It was, of course, an interesting country, because in 1954 there had been the famous overthrow of the Arbenz Government, which was considered by the United States Government to be Communist infiltrated. That is to say, there were Communists in various important positions in the government.

1954-63: Polarization of Guatemalan Public:Pro-Castillo Armas or Otherwise

As a result of that overthrow, there was a rather strange situation in Guatemala, even nine years later in 1963, because there was still a considerable polarization in the society between those who were considered to be pro-Castillo Armas, who was the colonel who

overthrew Arbenz and eventually became president, and those who were not with Castillo Armas. Many people, as a result, had curious things in their security files to the effect that they were pro-Communist, just because they were not pro-Castillo Armas. Indeed, one or two people on the USIS staff, that is, Guatemalans on the staff, even had problems at the time of the overthrow of Arbenz, not because they were pro-Communist—they were anything but, in fact they were very anti-Communist—but because they were not pro-Castillo.

One of the things that I found very strange was that although the US Government had decided after the overthrow of Arbenz it would try to help the Guatemalans build up democratic institutions in the country, including democratic labor unions, in the nine years between 1954 and 1963, not one labor union leader in Guatemala had been sent to the United States on an official grant. So I immediately talked to our labor attach# and said that I would like to set aside each year at least two slots for labor leaders.

Q: On the international visitors program?

DILLON: That's right. I asked him to come up with some suggestions, and then we interviewed these people and eventually chose two leaders to come to the university under the international visitor program. As I recall, I continued to do that during my term there, my three years. I felt that that particular segment of society had been very much neglected so far as our official program was concerned.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: That Institute, 25 years later, is going strong.

DILLON: Very much so, yes.

Q: What was it like in those days?

DILLON: When I arrived in Guatemala, some of my American colleagues who were taking me around to introduce me to people, said, “Now you must come over and see the IGA.” I didn't quite know what the IGA was first, and then I realized they were talking about the binational center, the Instituto Guatemalteco-Americano.

At that time, the binational center was in an old rather run-down former hotel in the center of the city, not too far from the USIS offices. I was a bit dismayed by the atmosphere of the place, but it had an active program, though it didn't have much money. Shortly after I arrived, a new American officer came down to be one of my assistant cultural affairs officers and to be the director of the binational center. I might say that at that time Guatemala had the largest cultural program in Central America. I had three assistant cultural affairs officers in addition to myself, so there were four Americans on the cultural side plus a fairly sizable Guatemalan staff.

Q: Would you say this was because of the political situation?

DILLON: That was because of the political situation, yes. Guatemala was and is also, of course, the largest country in the region in terms of population, so from that point of view it would generally have the largest program. But in this case, I would think it was the political situation. Also remember that in 1963, we were still in the heyday of the Alliance for Progress. President Kennedy had come to Costa Rica at that time; there was a great deal of excitement and interest in John F. Kennedy, and a great deal of sympathy for him. He was very well liked through Latin America.

Guatemala Reaction to Kennedy Assassination

Just as a diversion here, I might say, I was in Guatemala at the time that he was assassinated. Most of us in or out of the government generally remember what we were doing when that happened. I was home at lunch and I got a call from our information officer saying that the President had been shot in Texas. He didn't know at that point

whether the President was dead or not, but at least he had been seriously wounded. I rushed back to the office, and by that time we had gotten the word that the President was dead. Everybody, of course, was in a state of total shock, but we all had to gear up for the work that had to be done in connection with it.

The Guatemalans started to pour into our office in USIA and pour into the embassy expressing their condolences and asking what had happened and could we explain it. It was simply a tremendous outpouring of sorrow and shock in the country. I didn't leave Guatemala till January of 1966, and between November of '63 and January 1966, I cannot tell you how many ceremonies and inaugurations I attended of schools, libraries, clubs, etc., all named in honor of John F. Kennedy.

Unusually Heavy Educational Exchange Programin Guatemala

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say about Guatemala before we move on to Manila, where you went in 1966?

DILLON: In those days, since it was the height of the Alliance for Progress, we had a large program. We sent large numbers of university students on 30-day grants to the United States and also large numbers of university professors and people in other professions—journalists, other media leaders, artistic and cultural figures and political leaders. We also had a group of about ten American graduate students who came down each year under the Fulbright program and were at San Carlos University, and several American professors who came down under the Fulbright program to teach at the university. In addition to that, we had, of course, American professors and others coming down for short periods of time to participate in seminars, lectures, etc., etc.

Establishing Useful Contact with Previously Unapproached Economics Faculty at Guatemala's National University

I think one of the interesting things about my time in Guatemala was that in addition to not having sent any labor union leaders on grants before 1963, I also discovered that nobody at the embassy had any contact with the faculty of economics of the University of San Carlos, which is the national university. It was supposed to be one of the most anti-US and, some would say, pro-Communist faculties at the university. The faculty of economics, along with the faculty of law and the faculty of humanities, were considered the most anti-US

I decided that I would try to make contact at the faculty, and I was looking for a natural way of doing it. I received a notice from the Department of State in Washington that a professor of economics from the University of Texas was going to be traveling in the area and he would be available to come to Guatemala for a few days. I was delighted with this, and I immediately wrote a letter to the dean of the faculty of economics saying that this professor was coming and would he be interested in having him talk to the faculty and to the students. Well, a couple of days later, the dean was in my office and said, “Si, con mucho gusto,” they would be delighted to have him come.

As a result, we arranged for the professor to come. We set up a program for him in Guatemala City and also in Quazaltenango. The day after he arrived, I had a reception at my home for a group of the faculty members and student leaders to meet him before his lectures.

I didn't know the person who was coming; it was Calvin P. Blair, known as “Pat” Blair. I really was buying a pig in a poke, so to speak, because I didn't know just how simpatico he would be. It turned out he was perfectly marvelous. He came with practically no voice because he had been in Mexico for several days before arriving in Guatemala, and he had been up till 2:00 and 3:00 o'clock in the morning discussing all kinds of economic and other problems with university students. So I gave him a day to rest to try to get his voice back,

and then immediately sent him off beginning with this social event in my home, and then going on to a series of lectures. It was just a marvelous beginning.

As a result of that, I developed a very close relationship with the faculty, sent a number of their professors and students on grants to the United States, and also got the economic officers in the embassy and the director of the AID mission involved with the faculty. As a result of that particular opening, we were able to develop good relations with that faculty. As a matter of fact, the dean asked for a Fulbright professor. Unfortunately, during my time, the Department was unable to find a suitable candidate who could speak Spanish.

Q: Who would spend a period of time.

DILLON: And would spend a semester or a year. In any case, the point was we had this opportunity. It was an example of how one cultural program can lead to a number of other developments later on.

Q: That seems to be two excellent examples of the efforts that USIS can make in connections and contacts.

Dillon Also Mends US Fences WithUniversity Law Faculty

DILLON: Exactly. And in fields, perhaps, which you might not think of, you know, as being close to USIS. But I just happened to have an interest in labor unions and one of my minor fields was economics, so therefore I was interested in the faculty of economics, and one thing led to another.

I think one other interesting thing to tell about Guatemala would be about one of the professors in the faculty of law who had been the dean of that faculty back in the middle '50s—oh, I guess either during or shortly after the time of the Arbenz overthrow. He and some other deans had been invited by the United States Government at that time to go on

grants to the United States. It was part of the effort of the US Government to develop good relations with Guatemalans after the overthrow of Arbenz.

Unfortunately, he had a bad experience when he went to the interview for his visa in the consulate, and as a result, he simply refused to go and walked out in indignation. Now, I had known about this in Washington. When I came to Guatemala, my senior assistant cultural affairs director, Bob Rockweiler, had already been in the country for a year and a half, so he was instrumental, naturally, in introducing me to many of the people that I would have contact with in the future.

He came to me one day and said, “You know, there's someone I would like, if we could, give a grant—if we could work it out.”

I said, “Who?”

And he said, “Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro, who is a member of the faculty of law.”

I said, “Oh, I know about him.” And I said, “Yes, I'd be very eager to give him a grant if we can persuade him to take it.”

So given the fact that he had had this bad experience in the past, we had to approach him in a very delicate fashion. We asked a friend of his to approach him first and ask him if he would be interested in a 30-day grant to the United States, a leader grant, as it was known in those days. The friend came back to us and said yes, that Mendez Montenegro would be interested in discussing it.

Lic.Mendez came over to my office. In order to make sure that nothing would go wrong this time, I talked to our consul general and I said, “Look, send the papers over to my office and let me handle all the things over here.” He was extremely cooperative and said yes.

So we managed to do that. We sent Lic Mendez on the grant. He was absolutely delighted with his experience, and he came back just raving about the United States and how

wonderful the people were to him. I was invited to his home for dinner to meet other members of the family. His older brother was then the leader of one of the political parties, another brother was an attorney, another brother was an officer in the Guatemalan Army. One of the reasons that we were interested in Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro was because we were expecting him to become the next rector of the university, and that is what he had in mind.

As fate would have it, the brother, Mario, who was the leader of the Partido Revolucionario, the PR party, committed suicide, and Julio Cesar had to assume the leadership of the party. Not that he wanted to, because he had been out of politics since his student days in the 1940s, in the revolution of 1944 in Guatemala. But as you know, these parties are very personal, and so with his brother dead he had to step into the breach. He ran for the presidency in 1966 and won instead of becoming the rector of the university. [laughter] So we had done much better than we thought!

As a result, there were very good relations between the embassy and the president during his four years in office. I went down on an official visit to Guatemala in 1966 after his election but before he became president, and he and his wife invited me over to the house for tea. They were not living in their own home because it was not secure enough. They were living in a friend's home surrounded by guards, German shepherd dogs, machine guns and what have you, because there was great fear that he might be assassinated before he took over the presidency. Well, he was not, fortunately, and he managed to survive his four years in office.

I came back in 1969 on another visit. I was then at Brookings Institution as a federal executive fellow. This was after I came back from the Philippines. I was engaged in some research on Latin America, and I was doing a lot of interviewing. When I came to Guatemala, one of the people I wanted to see, of course, was the president. I went over to see him and we had a talk for about an hour or so. He said the one thing he hoped to accomplish was to finish his term in office and turn his office over to a freely-elected

president to succeed him. Then he was going to leave the country and go to Spain, which he did.

So that is the story of Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro. He was the last civilian president in Guatemala until the current president, Vinicio Cerezo Arebald took office in 1986. Lic. Mendez was back in Guatemala for President Cerezo's inauguration.

Q: They had a long period of military dictatorship.

DILLON: They had a period of military presidents for over 15 years.

1966: Cultural Attach# in Manila

Q: In 1966, then, you went to Manila as cultural affairs officer.

DILLON: Yes. I had come back to Washington briefly and was involved in an inter-agency committee on Vietnam. For a couple of months I was director of the Latin America book program. Then I was asked to go as cultural affairs officer to Manila, and I was there from 1966 to 1968.

I had not been eager to go to Manila. I would have preferred to remain in Latin America. As it turned out, it was a fascinating experience and I loved the people in the Philippines. I told them they were the Latin Americans of Asia. I noted the Spanish influence, after all the Philippines had been under Spanish rule for about 300 years. The only thing that seemed strange was that not too many people spoke Spanish; they spoke English or one of he indigenous languages.

Again, I managed to make contact with labor union leaders and gave them some grants working through our labor attach# there, and met a wide range of people in the cultural and educational field and also in the political field.

One of the very interesting things was that Carlos Romulo of UN and World War II fame in the Philippines— he had been with General MacArthur—at that time was both the president of the University of the Philippines and the Secretary of Education. So as a result of my job as cultural affairs officer, I had a lot of contact with General Romulo, as he liked to be called. We developed very close relations with the University of the Philippines and did a lot of things with them in terms of grants and seminars and held events on its campus, etc. We even managed to get our ambassador there for a Fulbright seminar, something which apparently had not been possible for a while because there had been some student demonstrations against the American ambassador coming to the campus.

Q: One of your responsibilities was chairing the Board of Directors of the Fulbright Commission, wasn't it?

DILLON: Yes, I was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Fulbright Foundation, which administered the Fulbright program. The ambassador was actually the honorary chairman, but he did not wish to be involved in an active way. Once in a while he would come to the meetings, but would just say, “Dorothy, you carry on.”

I found that the staff of the Foundation was actually in the embassy, down the hall from the cultural affairs office. I found this a little bit strange, because, as you know, it's a binational commission.

Q: Very unusual.

DILLON: But there were a lot of things that were strange in the Philippines because the relationship at that time was extremely close, and there was very little anti-US feeling in the Philippines. The people who were in control of things were the people who had gone through World War II and there was this feeling of camaraderie, you know, of feeling for the United States, that we had fought the World War together.

But I felt that the Fulbright Foundation should not be housed in the embassy and I was casting about to see how we could put it in offices of its own outside of the embassy. As always, we had budgetary problems. Well, the 20th anniversary of the Fulbright program in the Philippines was coming up in 1968.

Q: '67 probably, because last year was the 40th anniversary.

DILLON: Well, whichever it was, '67 or '68. I suggested to the Filipino representatives on the board that maybe as a birthday present to the Fulbright Foundation they might be able to put a little bit of money into the Foundation. Up to this time it had been supported completely by US money, even though it was a binational foundation. A contribution from the Philippines would enable the Foundation to move into new offices and increase the grants.

Well, in any case, this worked out, and so before I left in August of 1968, we managed to get the staff of the Foundation out of the embassy and into offices of its own. A new director came in—the old director was retiring because of illness—and the new director was a former Deputy Secretary of Education in the Philippines. That was, I guess, the great accomplishment of my time there, in terms of the Fulbright program.

A Year As a Brookings Institute Fellow

Q: Very good. When you returned from the Philippines, you spent a year at the Brookings Institute.

DILLON: Yes. When I came back to Washington, I was at Brookings for a year as a federal executive fellow. I was interested in getting back to my own field, Latin America, and doing some research and writing. Brookings offered me that opportunity for a year.

Q: Did you work on some special project?

DILLON: I worked on a study of Latin-American opinion on relations between the United States and Latin America. In addition to my fellowship grant from the agency, I received some travel funds which enabled me to make several trips to Latin America during that year. I interviewed hundreds of people, in addition to studying public opinion surveys, newspaper articles, editorials, and so forth. I produced a study called “The Two Americas: A Dialogue.” It is something that I hope to return to now that I'm out of government and therefore freer to publish.

Then Gradual Ascension to Assistant Director,Latin America

Q: After your year at Brookings, you got back to the Latin American side of USIA activities by becoming desk officer and then policy officer, then deputy assistant director and, finally, assistant director for Latin America for the agency.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: In those various jobs, you again traveled quite extensively throughout Latin America.

DILLON: Yes, I traveled several times a year. I used to take what I called “bites,” take four or five countries at a time. My deputy and I divided the territory. One would go to one set of countries at one time, the other would go to another set. In the course of he year, at least one of us and the desk officer for that particular country normally would have visited the country and talked to the USIS people first-hand and had a chance to look at their programs.

Q: That's essential, isn't it, to have face-to-face contact on the problems?

DILLON: Oh, yes, that's very important. It's one thing to read reports, but it's another thing to be on the scene and to actually see what is going on.

I might say, recalling my Guatemalan days, my assistant cultural affairs officer Jack Brockman, who had become director of the binational center when I was in Guatemala, was a very good businessman, and he managed to put the center on its feet financially. During our time in Guatemala, we put away, as I recall, something like $25,000 as a nest egg to eventually build a center. Well, over time, that center was eventually built.

Q: It's a beautiful center now.

DILLON: By the time I became area director, the center was built, dedicated, and flourishing. It's a very lovely place. Unfortunately, it was damaged by the earthquake which took place in February of 1976, but it was covered by insurance and eventually was restored. In any case, there was a happy ending to the binational center in Guatemala, IGA.

Q: You were in the Latin American office in these various jobs from 1970 to 1976.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: Can you tell us something about the role of USIA during those years?

DILLON: Perhaps I might begin with the policy officer job, because that job, as you know, since you were in it eventually, entailed attendance at inter-agency meetings over at the Department of State, and participation in the comments on and revisions of the CASPs, the Country Action Strategic Papers that each embassy had to produce. They were sent to Washington for comment at the inter-agency level.

Q: These were the State Department documents?

DILLON: Everybody participated in them.

Q: Right. Inter-agency.

DILLON: USIA participated, CIA, AID, and the economic and political sections, all the sections of the embassy.

Q: We were talking about the CASP. Also, as policy officer, you got very much involved in the country plans for USIA at that time.

Comments on Value and Nature of Country Plans

DILLON: Yes, indeed. I must say that I was not always in sympathy with the efforts of the agency in Washington to put so much paperwork on the USIA folks abroad. I tried, as much as possible, to cut down on the country plans, to make them shorter. I felt that there was just no reason for producing very lengthy documents, which in many cases became figments of the imagination because you were planning a year or so ahead on what you thought you might do. As we all know from our experience in the field, you very frequently have to take advantage of so-called targets of opportunity, and you may not always do exactly what you have planned ahead to do because something comes along that you find is extremely useful from a program point of view, and you may decide that you want to do that.

So far as the country plans are concerned, as I say, my own feeling was that the shorter they were, the better.

Q: But you do need some kind of documented planning.

DILLON: You need some kind of a focus so that the people at each post get together to work out what they plan to do. What are they trying to accomplish in that particular country? What do they want to emphasize? Where are the problems in relations between the United States and that country? Where are the misunderstandings? Do the people lack knowledge of the United States or of US policy or do they lack understanding of US policy? Therefore, it seems to me that you do want to plan in terms of those areas, rather

than just scattering your shot and just doing everything and anything that might come into your mind.

As I say, my feeling is simply that these should not be long, detailed document, but rather short documents which would lay down in general terms what you plan to do over the next year or so.

Explaining Watergate Abroad

Q: You were area director during the time of the Nixon troubles, Watergate and so forth.

DILLON: Yes, indeed. I must say I sympathized with our people in the field at that time having to explain this to foreign audiences. One amusing side of that problem was that in our area, in Latin America—and this happened in other areas, too, I think, in Europe and elsewhere, but I certainly know it happened in Latin America—the people sometimes wondered what we were making all the fuss about because, given what they were used to in their political systems, they didn't quite see why we were getting so excited about what Nixon had done. So there was a great deal of explaining to do.

VOA's Performance During Watergate

One thing that I must say about this period, at least as I experienced it,, was that the Voice of America was able to report what was going on. They were not hindered from doing this by the director of the agency. They were told, “Don't report just rumors and so forth.” But “When you've got your facts straight, report the bad along with the good.” And so as far as I was aware, during this troubled period the agency functioned as it was supposed to function. In terms of the Voice of America, one of its functions is to report the news straight about the United States and other things. I must say that during that period, VOA was permitted to do that.

VOA's Relevancy in Latin America

Q: As area director at that time, what was your relationship with the Voice? Was there a close relationship?

DILLON: Well, yes, because one of the things that I hoped to do as area director was to try to revitalize the Voice of America programs in Latin America. Short-wave radio is not that vital to Latin America. You look upon it as something that you can fall back on in a crisis. If you get into a situation in a country where all the media come under the control, let us say, of the government, and the USIS program is hampered, there remains, then, the Voice of America, which can be picked up directly by the people in that country for the news and for explanations of US policy. So from that point of view, it's important. But on a day-to-day basis in Latin America, we just have so many other opportunities and we have so many opportunities to be on the air directly in these countries by providing programs to the radio stations, in addition, of course, to television, motion pictures and the press and everything else, that short-wave broadcasting to Latin America does not play the same role in this area as it does, say, in Eastern Europe, where it is a much more vital means of communication due to all the restrictions put on the rest of our programming in those countries.

Now, in the case of Cuba, of course, where the situation would be somewhat comparable to Eastern Europe in terms of restrictions on what we can do, since we don't have full diplomatic relations, VOA is more important. On the other hand, Cuba being so close to the US, people in Havana can easily get radio and television programs from the United States, from Florida and other places.

We did have, for about 13 years, a special program for Cuba called “Cita Con Cuba.” It was started during the Kennedy Administration and was given up during the Nixon Administration, as I recall, shortly after I came in as area director. The people in the Voice felt that it really wasn't accomplishing anything at that point, and that the regular Voice o

America programs were getting into Cuba, and therefore they didn't quite see the need to continue this program.

I mention it because several years ago, various groups in this country decided that what Cuba needed was a special radio program for Cuba. This was Radio Marti, which at first, those who supported the idea of this program wanted to set up as a medium-wave program outside of the United States Information Agency. Well, to make a long story short, because of opposition from some radio broadcasters in this country who were worried about their own radio programs being interfered with if Castro carried out his threat to jam this new radio program, and for other reasons, it eventually was set up within the United States Information Agency and is functioning there today. I really don't know anything much about it directly at this point, since I'm no longer in the agency, but I read about it in the USIA newsletter and so forth. It's going on. Whether it's accomplishing anything or what it's accomplishing, of course, I don't really know.

Radio Marti

Q: After that 13 years of the "Cita Con Cuba" program, didn't it appear at that time that the US and Cuba were going to normalize relations?

DILLON: Well, there were a number of attempts, yes. There were a number of attempts to come together with Cuba and to see whether or not something could be worked out. Of course, as a result of the setting up of Radio Marti, the agreement that we had made several years ago with Cuba on immigration simply fell by the wayside because Castro was angry about the setting up of Radio Marti. Just recently that agreement has been reactivated. I guess that Castro and company decided that Radio Marti was not that much of a threat to them. I don't know what this says about the effectiveness of Radio Marti. [laughter]

Q: Is there anything else that you'd care to comment about as far as that particular period of your USIA career?

Audience Data System at Posts Valuable?

DILLON: It's not a terribly interesting subject, but it's vital in terms of programming overseas, given the fact that our people change and play this game of musical chairs so much, people moving around from one country to another. During my time as area director we set up an audience data system in each of our posts in Latin America whereby each of the posts were required to make a very special effort—a concerted, detailed effort with the help from specialists in Washington—to set up a system whereby they would have the names, addresses, biographical information, etc., on a wide range of their contacts in each one of the countries.

I might say that this was very hard to do because all the PAOs resisted it, and I can understand why. I probably would have resisted it myself if I were in their position. But I think those of us who served in the field for all those years prior to this know what the problem is when you come in new to a post and you find a little box of cards off in the corner someplace with some names in it. This is your audience data, and they're probably five or ten years old, and the people have either died or moved in the meantime. So you start all over from scratch. So I said to all the PAOs, “Look, I know it's going to be a chore to do this, but once you leave this post and you go into another post where this has been done, you're going to be thankful for it.” And we did manage to set this up in all of the Latin American posts before I left office. I believe now it is worldwide in the agency. I've forgotten now what they call it, some other name. But in any case, it's the same idea. It's now on computers, I believe.

Q: When it first started, there was some controversy about whether or not we should do this?

DILLON: It was a chore, you see. It was a boring chore to do it, and that was the real problem for everybody, for the national employees and the Americans to make out all these cards containing information on all their contacts, then to file them and group them, an then to begin to use them when sending out invitations and sending out publications and whatever you do in terms of your programming. That was, I think, the reason for the resistance. It was simply the resistance to the kind of work that was involved in setting up the system.

Then, of course, the problem is that you must keep it up to date. If you don't, then all the work has been in vain, because five years later, you're back at square one.

Diplomat in Residence at American University

Q: After being area director and before you retired, you became diplomat-in-residence at the American University for two years.

DILLON: Yes. I was planning, actually, simply to retire after my three years as area director. The then- director of the agency asked me if I would like to participate in the diplomat-in-residence program at Fletcher. I said, “Well, I can't go to Massachusetts to do that.” My mother was still alive and she wasn't well. I said, “I really can't leave Washington but I would like to do it in one of the Washington universities.”

So the director of personnel said to me, “Where would you like to do it? Who might be interested?”

I had a lot of contacts at American University with the Latin American faculty there, and I talked to the then-dean of the School of International Service, who happened to be somebody who was interested in Latin America and had been briefly in the Foreign Service as a political appointment, I think, during the Kennedy years. He was delighted to have me come as the diplomat-in-residence. Among other things, I handled their internship program. The university had a program for students coming from colleges out of the

Washington area for a semester to study US foreign policy, US economic policy, etc. Part of this program involved two or three days each week of internship in a public or private agency in Washington where they would get first-hand work experience as part of their academic credit. So I was involved in that.

Then I was involved in advising students in the School of International Service with respect to Foreign Service careers. I also participated in courses, a variety of courses, and also gave a course on Latin America one of the semesters. At the end of my first year, the dean asked if I could stay for a second year, and the then-director of our agency, John Reinhardt, agreed for me to stay on for a second year at American University. Then I retired after that from the agency.

Q: So you began your career in academia, and I can't say that you ended your career in academia, but you went back to it for a while, because your career hadn't ended yet.

DILLON: As a result of my two years as diplomat-in- residence, I found out that the six universities in the District of Columbia are involved in a consortium. Some of the Latin American faculty in the universities had managed to get a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to set up a Center of Latin American Studies. They asked me if I would be interested in becoming director of the center when I would retire from the government. So that's how I became Director of the Washington Center for Latin American Studies, a center which represented the Latin American programs of the six universities in the consortium of universities.

Member of Foreign Service Grievance Board

Q: You also, since 1984, have been a member of the Foreign Service Grievance Board (FSGB).

DILLON: Yes. I had resigned from the Center in 1982. I was tired of raising money and in January 1987 I was appointed by the Secretary of State to the FSGB for two years, subject

to renewal. I'm now towards the end of my second term. You have to be approved by the heads of all the agencies and by the unions. That means the Foreign Service Association and AFGE. Plus, the Secretary of State, the Director of USIA, the Director of AID, the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of Agriculture. In other words, any place where there's Foreign Service officers.

It has been a very interesting experience. It's much more common to grieve these days than it used to be, and every once in a while you feel that you're able to do something positive for somebody who really was treated rather badly by his/her particular agency. You can redress some wrongs.

Current Status of Women Officers in USIA

Q: On another subject, you've been active in women's affairs during your career with USIA. I wondered if you would care to comment on how things have changed, as I assume they have somewhat, with respect to women officers in USIA, for example.

DILLON: In general, they've changed somewhat for the better, but not as much as you might think in the last 20 years or so. Obviously, we have more women officers, for example, in the Foreign Service, and we also have a few more women at the senior level. But I recall a couple of years ago, I think it was about a year or two after the Foreign Service Act of 1980 was passed, some of the women who were still in the foreign affairs agencies and active in the Women's Action Organization (which was founded in the early 1970s and in which I was vice president for USIA sometime in the early 1970s) made an attempt to call attention to the continued discrimination against women in the foreign affairs agencies.

They testified before a Congressional subcommittee on how the Foreign Service Act of 1980 was being implemented. One of the things the Act said was that the Foreign Service should represent, to a greater extent than it had in the past, the American population, which would mean more women, more minority men and women, etc. The testimony was

directed to how much had been accomplished since the Act had been passed. These women said that really not much had been accomplished. They complained that although there were a few more women in senior grades in these agencies, these women were not being given appointments commensurate with their personal grade. I still hear complaints like that today.

In my own case, of course, I told you that one of my reasons for joining the Foreign Service at the time I did in 1960 was to get out of a particular situation where I had no legal protection at that time. I mean, anybody could discriminate against anybody, against women, blacks, Hispanics, etc. There was no law to prevent it; there was no civil rights legislation, you see. When I transferred to the Foreign Service, I then found, as time went on, I never got promotions. And also in my Foreign Service career, I was recommended for certain positions and again turned down because I was a woman. I said, “Well, I thought this was illegal now.” [laughter]

Anyhow, when I was in the Philippines in 1968, I decided that since I had been in a Class I job (old class II, now Class Seven Foreign Service) for two years and still had not received any promotion, I would file a grievance with USIA before I returned from the Philippines. This was in 1968. I was the first woman in a foreign affairs agency to file such a grievance on the basis of gender discrimination. My complaint never received publicity because I had such a clear case that the agency didn't have a leg to stand on.

When I came back to Washington, I discovered that the grievance officer who investigated my case not only had found all the things that I knew about, but had found others I didn't know anything about. He said, “It is absolutely clear that your career has been hurt in the agency by discrimination.”

One of the things that I found very disturbing was that the USIA inspector to whom I had mentioned my problems when I was in Manila, wrote an evaluation of me—at that time inspectors wrote individual evaluations— which was very flattering in terms of my work

in the Philippines, but then went on to say, “She has complained about discrimination against her as a woman, and therefore I recommend that she not be promoted.” (I wasn't). [laughter] And of course, I would never have known anything about this except that the grievance officer had found it in my file. He said, “We have now taken it out and destroyed it. He never should have done this.”

Q: And fortunately, inspectors don't make those individual evaluations anymore.

DILLON: No, no.

Q: Based on a one-week visit or five days.

DILLON: Exactly. I've done two inspections, so I know how little you can learn about people in a week or two. So anyhow, that was taken out of my file. Then there was something put in my file to the effect that as a result of an agency investigation, yes, indeed, my career had been harmed by discrimination over many years. And as a result, the next time around, I finally got a promotion, after 13 years.

Q: I gather you feel we have a long way to go, but there has been some improvement.

DILLON: Yes. During my three years as area director (I was the first woman to head a geographical area in USIA), I tried to help all the groups that I felt had been discriminated against—blacks, Hispanics and women. I brought up from something like 5% to 20% or more the number of women officers that we had in Latin America. We only had one woman PAO who was actually appointed by my predecessor.

Q: Was that Barbara Hutchison?

DILLON: Yes. I tried very hard to find women candidates, but one of the problems was that the women were so far behind in terms of their grades that it was very difficult to find anybody to fill a PAO position. They were all too junior. I did much better on blacks and

Hispanics. I had, I think, three black PAOs and three Hispanic PAOs during my time as area director.

My colleague at that time, George Haley, who was the assistant director in charge of equal employment in the agency—he himself is a black, Alexander Haley's brother—.

Q: The author of Roots.

DILLON: That's right. George said to me, “You know, the problem in USIA is not discrimination against blacks; the problem is discrimination against women.”

Advisability of Sending Groups of Social ScienceTeachers to US—Especially from Secondary Schools

Q: Interesting. Finally, before we close, is there anything that we haven't covered that perhaps you want to comment on?

DILLON: There's one program that I was involved in in Guatemala which I would like to emphasize because it dealt with a group of people very much neglected in recent years. When I came to Guatemala a group of 50 social science teachers at the secondary level had just returned from two months in the States. They had been accompanied by two embassy officers, one of the political officers and one of the assistant cultural affairs officers, the one in charge of exchanges. I think it was one of the most successful programs that I have ever seen. I can say this because I was not involved in sending the group but I worked with the group after they came back. Because of their experience, for the next three years we didn't have to follow them up; they followed us. They visited us frequently and went out in groups of twos and threes to give talks all over the country about their experiences in the United States.

At that time, we had a special program for high schools outside of Guatemala City because they were very much neglected. One of the senior Guatemalans on my staff had

been a former high school teacher, so he was in charge of this program. The American students used to go out and talk to the students, the American officers went out, and these Guatemalans and others, but particularly this group who had been to the United States. They went out to all these schools for nothing. They got only their expenses, their travel, and, if they stayed overnight, their room and board, but that was all. They talked in schools, in village squares, etc. The program was a tremendous success in terms of the participants teaching. Since textbooks are very poor or nonexistent, the teacher is extremely important in influencing the attitudes of students, particularly at the high school level, where these attitudes are being formed.

I said at that time, if I had enough money I would send every social science secondary school teacher in Guatemala on such a program. Needless to say, I didn't have the money, but I notice now that under this big exchange program that the agency now has as a result of the recommendation of the Kissinger Report on Central America, that some secondary teachers are being included in that—not many, but some. I wish that people involved in the educational exchange program would realize what can be accomplished if you get at this particular group of teachers at the secondary school level. It really can have a very significant effect, not only on their methods of teaching and how well they may teach, but in forming the attitudes of students.

Q: A very effective program. Thank you.

End of interview